DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 173 753 CS 004 841

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TITLE	Fotonovela. Technical Note No. 13.
INSTITUTION	Massachusetts Univ., Amherst. Center for International Education.; Ministerio de Educacion Publica, Quito (Ecuador).
SPONS AGENCY	Agency for International Development (Dept. of State), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	15p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for International Education, 285 Hills House South, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003 ($1.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Literacy; Change Agents; *Change Strategies; *Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; *Instructional Materials; Learning Processes; Literacy; *Nonformal Education; Program Content; *Program Development; Publications; Social Action; Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS	Ecuador; *Fotonovela

ABSTRACT

This report contains a description of a program that sought to develop the fotonovela as an instrument for increasing literacy and consciousness awareness in Ecuador. Following a general introduction to the work of the Nonformal Education Project, the creator of this program, the report presents information about the antecedents and characteristics of the fotonovela and about the content of the fotonovelas produced in the program. Discussions of the precautions taken in preparing the fotonovelas, the distribution systems used, and the possible uses of the publications are also included. The report concludes with a summary of what was learned by the developers of the program. (FL)

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The Ecuador Non-Formal Education Project is a joint project of the Ministry of Education in Ecuador and the University of Massachusetts, Center for International Education, funded under the auspices of the United States Agency for International Development.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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TECHNICAL NOTE NO.

13

FOTONOVELA

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Fotonovelas produced by: Rodrigo Villacis

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SUMMARY: Description of the conceptualization, design and use of the fotonovela as an instrument of literacy and consciousness awareness.

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TECHNICAL NOTES

ECUADOR NONFORMAL EDUCATION / EDUCACION EXTRA-ESCOLAR

This series of Technical Notes has been produced by staff members of the Ecuador Nonformal Education Project. Each note focuses on a particular issue or technique which has been developed and tested in Ecuador. The notes contain the information available at the time of writing and analytic comments based upon available evaluation data. However, the notes are in no way an evaluation of the project. Their purpose is to share ideas and information about new techniques as they are developed. Project staff want to encourage comments and suggestions from readers who may have had experience with similar techniques in other settings.

The project is financed by USAID and is a joint undertaking of the Ministry of Education in Ecuador and the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts. Ideas and materials derived from the ideas were created jointly by staff in Massachusetts and staff in Ecuador. All materials have undergone considerable change in the field as usage in various situations indicated needed modifications. The notes attempt to accurately credit the creators of each technique. In some cases, though, ideas have been modified by a variety of people and precise assignment of credit is difficult. In all cases, various members of the staff have made substantial inputs into the final version of the materials.

After three years of effort the number of people in Ecuador and in the United States who have made substantial contributions to this project is considerable. Rather than trying to enumerate the particular contributions of each, we will only note that this has been a genuine bi-national effort.

These Technical Notes are reports of work in progress and will be issued periodically as they are written. A small charge of $1.00 per copy will be made to partially defray the costs of reproduction and mailing. The Technical Notes are available in both English and Spanish and may be obtained by writing to:

Ecuador Project , Hills House South
School of Education
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts 01002

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Series Editor & Principal Investigator

Technical Note #13 (English)
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 0-932288-28-6

THE FOTONOVELA

I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Nonformal Education Project of the University of Massachusetts was its readiness for experimentation with new ideas which eventually could constitute valid innovations in the strategy of social change in the rural sector of the country.

In this geographic sector, the established media of communication ignore the rural population, responding almost exclusively to commercial interests, obviously found in other sectors. It could be said that in this order of things, the rural dwellers use only the radio, and this medium is generally used only for entertainment.

The Project designed and began a program of Radio and Radiovisión, referred to in another chapter of this document, to carry messages with educational content to the countryside. But it was obvious that certain types of messages required a different medium or the combined action of different media.

The idea of experimenting with the fotonovela came up in view of its wide acceptance by the rural sector, even though the high index of illiteracy obviously limits circulation.

However, the consumption of the fotonovela in Ecuador is high. No less than fifteen titles appear periodically at the newsstands and they are quickly bought. Thousands of copies are devoured by a public which looks at them as entertainment or for escape, but they also, curiously, look at them to learn ("They teach and inspire me in love," "They teach me the behavior of women in different places.")[1]

All the fotonovelas that circulate in Ecuador are foreign, principally from Mexico, with plots of Corin Tellado and other similar authors who deal exclusively with romantic themes. These fotonovelas have been accused of alienating people, of stimulating conformity, passivity and laziness.

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[1] Encuesta, "Fotonovelas" 1x1 No. 4-5, Quito.

Several sections of this Technical Note have been published previously in the Non-Formal Education in Ecuador document.

Without taking any position about the justification of the fotonovelas, the Project decided to experiment with this genre, Literature or not, it could become a vehicle to reach a public on the fringe of the established communication media, helping thereby to compensate for the lack of existing social opportunities for the Ecuadorian campesino.

II. ANTECEDENTS

When the Nonformal Education Project began to talk about the production of an educational fotonovela, the educators we knew reacted in different ways. To some, it appeared to be a sensational idea, others believed that we were joking, and some preferred not to comment, which was an indication of their opinion.

In any case, the plan was poorly received by those who represented the traditional concept of learning and teaching. To them it was not only a heretical project, but also irreverent and even grotesque. However, given that our intention was to break down the pre-established canons of education, we continued giving form to the plan. Our objective was to use the format of the commercial fotonovela, with the goal of transmitting educational messages within the context of what we understand to be education. That is to say, contribute to that which man is in every sense of the word, and help him to gain his economic, cultural and political freedom.

Within this idea we had to write the scripts around a central character called Manuel Santi. The name Santi is not well known in the Ecuadorian Highlands, but we chose it for its sonority in the first place, and also because there exists a leader of the same name in the eastern region of our country.

Don Santi is a man well known in the zone of El Puyo, where since his youth he has constantly confronted abusive authorities in some cases and the landowners in others. A few years ago, he was elected a Provincial Advisor, with which, it could be said, he crowned a political career that, although within the system, achieved some

vindication for those of his class. The hero of our fotonovela was born then, inspired by a man who actually exists.

Given that the general purpose of the Nonformal Education Project was to produce educational alternatives outside of the scholarly environment, all of our efforts were channeled to the acquisition of extra-curricular education methodologies and of materials that serve as much the process of conceptualization as the internalization and practice of skills. Literacy is only an instrument for a more widespread action. In this way, all of our activities were directed toward goals that were beyond pure cognitive learning.

In developing the concept of the fotonovela, for example, we established objectives in the following order:

1. To increase the self-confidence of the campesino reader. By way of this objective we intended to return the self-assurance that the rural mestizo as well as the Indian has lost in his dealings with the urban man who is generally white or sometimes mestizo.
2. To create, if it does not exist, and develop the sense of solidarity. In other words, to sponsor the formations of human community and a community of action.
3. To create and present images that foster the concept of organization, which includes decision making, communicating, and strategy planning for action to move forward.

III. CHARACTERISTICS

Once the decision to produce a series of educational fotonovelas was made, we discussed the definition of their morphological characteristics and their content.

In the first place it was evident that they should be produced in such a way as to compete with the commercial fotonovelas; that is, that they should be just as attractive to the public. It was necessary in the beginning, therefore, to give them a presentation as good as the best foreign editions, with stories that possessed the magnetism of the genre, avoiding any didactic appearance.

For this purpose a few stories were written using the chosen central character; action and romance were consciously utilized to draw the attention of the reader.

Previously more precise goals had been made:

1. To create elements of follow-up and continuity for the practice and internalization of reading skills.
2. To destroy the belief that the existing communications media are open only to people who are urban, educated, and of the white culture.
3. To promote the development and strengthening of the campesino culture in general, and the Indian culture in particular.
4. To provide material that stimulates the directed discussions toward the following reinforcing aspects of individual totality: a.) self-esteem, b.) solution of conflicts, c.) strategy and decision making, and d.) community autonomy and solidarity.

Design: In accordance with the leaders in the market and a previous study of costs, it was decided that the project fotonovelas would have the following physical characteristics:

Format: 21 X 28 cm.
Number of pages: 16 plus 4 for the cover
Paper: Offset newsprint for the interior pages and 120 gram couche for the cover.
Color: Interior 1 color and cover 4 colors
Impression: Offset
Binding: Two staples at the fold
Photographic Format: 4 to 6 photographs per page

Recommendations:

1) When a passage requires emphasis to have the maximum effect on the reader, the photograph should be large and a close-up.
2) It is very important to maintain tonal balance and photograph sizes proportional to the effect you wish to have on the reader. For example, if the proportions are more or less the same, the reader has to analyze the page too closely. On the other hand, if there is too much contrast in size and tonality, the reader

becomes confused and tired.

3) If it is possible, a message or scene should be completed on each page. This permits the reader to think about the information given in a unit or with unity. Further, it allows the reader to situate himself mentally in one place or area of action. In this way, the mental connection between place, personalities and the story is made more easily.

The above recommendations require two planning activities for implementation:

1) A drawing, approximating the photographic proportions of each page, should be made which details the poses and gestures of the actors in each photograph. This will serve as the major production guides for the photographic sessions.
2) A realistic plan for production should be made which will include a calendar or deadline for photographs, a detailed description of location, clothes, actors, props and other important details that must be considered for the photographs.

Theme:

With the stories discussed at length and with the dimensions of the fotonovela very precise, the scripts were elaborated. The themes dealt with were the following:

a. Conflict of class and with authority (strategy and decision-making): "Between Love and Hope."
b. The problem of alcoholism (solution of conflicts): "The Stain of Aji."
c. The inequitable distribution of land (self-esteem, strategy and decision making); "Who Does Our Land Belong To?"
d. The problem of irrigation water and the disunity of the people (autonomy and community solidarity): "Water That You Must Not Drink."

IV. THE CONTENT

The first series of the fotonovela, "Manuel Santi", contains various parts:

a. The title page
b. The story
c. Announcements or a promotion of nonformal education materials
d. Letters to the editor, and
e. A comic strip of Jose Manuel.

a) The title page is a very important element in terms of sales, that is, the acceptance of the fotonovela, and also for the message relayed by the cover image. Manuel Santi, for example, in the first fotonovela titled, "Between Love and Hope" appears with his girl friend, Juana, both looking at something off in the distance. Manuel Santi's clenched fist is raised, which could have symbolic meaning to the campesino reader. Juana's expression is optimistic, almost cheerful, in contrast to the expression of Manuel Santi, which is serious, almost grim and decisive.

In the case of the first fotonovela ("Between Love and Hope") one finds on the back cover a photographic theme that could be interpreted as a group reflecting or talking about it: a group of children who are looking avidly at something before their eyes. The background of the photograph is black and above it is the question: Who are these children? Below it is another question: What are they looking at? And later after moments of suspense, on the right side is another question: ...And you?

The purpose is to stimulate reflection and dialogue in groups of peasants using, in this case, a visual recourse.

b) After the title page comes the principal part which is the story where Manuel Santi, the hero of the fotonovela, finds himself in different situations that show his personality and at the same time create a spirit of solidarity in the incipient communal life of which he is a part.

In the series of fotonovelas published up to now, Manuel Santi has been presented in four distinct situations: The first involves the construction and acquisition of a small school with the intervention of local and national authorities. In the second,

Manuel Santi contends with the conflicts provided by the alcoholism of some of his neighbors. In this occasion Santi looks for the cause of the neighborhood situation, visiting the house of those who were implicated in the death of a companion. He and the political lieutenant initiate an investigation and by different means find out that the reason the residents of the community drink is not only to socialize but on occasion to escape a realtiy that is cruel and at times insufferable. "The whole crop was ruined by the frost, and I have many debts...with drink I forget." The wife of another says, "He spends all the money on drink! He is paid on Saturday morning and goes drinking immediately. He doesn't even know what is happening ..." In the end Manuel Santi, in some cases, clears up the problems of his enighbors; in others, the takes the role of an active leader; but he always creates unity in his family and in the neighborhood.

His adventures run from the negotiation for peasant rights, as in the case of a lack of water for irrigation, to the resolution of problems of land tenure or the utilization of local roads.

Santi always counts on the support of his girlfriend, Juana, and his friends who provide him with unconditional help. The small group to which he belongs has high regard for mutual help and solidarity. They are together to play soccer, to talk on the street corner of the plaza in Malchimpamba, and when necessary, confront official authorities and external dangers.

c) The announcement of nonformal educational materials was an interesting element of this publication. We intended to introduce various fluency games that the project had designed previously and that proved valid for Indian and mestizo communities of the Ecuadorian highlands. However, we found that this publicity had results in the city rather than in the country. We received requests for these learning materials coming mainly from organizations and readers interested in anthropology and sociology or from educators who wished to innovate their own systems.

d) In the section of Letters to the Editor or Letters to Manuel Santi, the effect was very interesting. Initially, we invented some letters from fictitious readers that in any case were based on commentary from the rural readers that we had collected. The curious thing was that this initial invention provoked a series of letters written by the readers, this time completely authentic, who commented on the effects of the fotonovela in their communities, in some cases questioned the format or the validity of the stories, and in other cases asked for more information about the life of Manuel Santi and his heroic adventures.

e) The last section on the back cover is intended to inject a humorous note in the context of the magazine and to present the same Manuel Santi from a different perspective. While in the serious part of the story Manuel Santi is constantly in a position attacking directly the reality of subjugation in which he and his community live, in the humorous section Jose Manuel jokes about the myths and stereotypes of which the Ecuadorian peasant is victim. We see, for example, in fotonovela No. 1: First picture (without words) Jose Manuel agitatedly approaches the door of a great church where a little half naked girl and an Indian woman are seated. Second picture (Jose Manuel knealing before the confessional obviously very devout and wide-eyed.) "But, Son... why then do you confess?" Fourth picture (Jose Manuel with a very ingenuous expression and at the same time a little sly). "Yes, Father...it is because they say that the Indian who does not steal, sins."

V. SUMMARY

In the first issues of our publication, we tried to close each episode on an optimistic and hopeful note. This rationalization, unconscious of course, put us in a position of creating a cathartic process in our readers. In other words, in attempting to transmit optimism we were in fact transmitting an unreal world, where justice prevailed, where all proble were solved,and where ethics governed the

actions of communities and of men.

Once aware of this utopia,we also recognized the perspective of fairy tales that we were creating for our readers. And this is again an example of the sublime message that the producer or director can unwittingly transmit to the public becasue of his own ingenuousness.

The next step was to look for alternatives to the happy ending. First, we tried to look for a more "existentialist" ending that did not present a solution or an unreal situation. Another possiblity was to create various endings, which is what we finally decided on for the fourth issue. Here a happy ending is sketched out first, but turning the page, the reader becomes aware that it was only a story he was listening to and that reality was something else. Then, the other ending, which is not exactly happy, is dramatized on the following pages.

VI. PRECAUTIONS

a) In elaborating the definitive texts of the fotonovelas, that is, the phrases attributed to each character, special care was taken. Each sentence, each word was virtually weighed and measured, not only to avoid mistakes but also to facilitate reading by people who do not know the language well, and who are sometimes at the most semi-literate.

We used the Inventory of Vocabulary of Frequent Use by Carlos Poveda and Antonio Merizalde (Quito, 1969), and the Formula of Spaulding[2] to establish the density of language.

b) In writing the script every page was set up to contain a complete scene in order to facilitate comprehension of the content and to give a uniform rhythm to the story as was appropriate for the target public.

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[2]CIESPAL, Quito. September, 1972.

c) The script demanded absolute precision in graphics as much in the angle as in the depth of each shot as well as the details of the environment, etc. In order to cover any possibility of error and to give the editor more creative freedom, at least three versions of each shot were taken, introducing to the instructions for the script any modifications that seemed opportune during the shooting sessions.

d) The tentative diagram of each page, which was delineated concomitantly with the elaboration of the script, was modified in view of the photographs taken in order to achieve a symmetrically balanced composition that would respond to the corresponding play of images.

VII. DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

We tested the following systems of distribution:

a. The commercial mechanism of the Munoz Hnos. Company is the best organization of its kind. By its methods, we might have hoped to far outsell all the other fotonovelas. However, it is not an appropriate system for our publication because it does not reach the rural sector. Its public is almost exclusively in urban areas.

b. We gave a limited number of copies to sell to people who work on the interprovincial transport system--namely, railroad and bus ticket sellers. These people together sold 100 copies in a month. We think that this means of distribution is potentially efficient.

c. We also gave fotonovelas to sell to some grocery stores at the small town level, but the results were not very encouraging.

d. By way of educational systems we intended to test the receptivity of our fotonovelas as material for the learning and continuity of reading. Several centers for adult education received them free of charge as instructional material, but only a few copies were actually used.

e. The best vehicle for the distribution of the fotonovela turned out to be the "charlatan", a traveling salesman who goes from fair to fair hawking his wares. One of them managed to sell thousands of copies all over the country to exactly the people for whom it was intended.

VII. POSSIBLE USES OF THE FOTONOVELA

The non-formal education project basically attempted to introduce the fotonovela as complementary material for the centers for adult education in a functional way, and as material for new readers in the case of sale to the general public. However, we now think that there are other possible uses for the fotonovela. One of the most important of these uses is as supplementary material or helping material for the school system. Subjects such as Civic Education or the History of Ecuador which by nature are rather arid could be easily simplified by way of the use of different audiovisual aids. Within nonformal education, the fotonovela can be combined with other expressive elements such as puppet shows, community theater, learning games and educational series. These combinations would always depend not only on a program with clear, specific goals and personnel who are dedicated to their work, but also on the ability to coordinate their efforts to the best advantage. Specifically, we suggest the areas of nutrition, agriculture and health (as it deals with improved sanitation), where the methods of nonformal education in general and the fotonovelas in particular can be used as instruments that can transfer skills with excellent results.

IX. WHAT WE LEARNED

Given that our program was very experimental, the goals we focused on from the beginning had little to do with expansion, the number of persons or communities that we reached, or with the reduction of costs in a unitary analysis. Instead, we tried to constantly test even the most hairbrained ideas in such a way that this creative exercise might result in new knowledge by way of experiences that

we ourselves created. This is the case of the fotonovela, and we can attest to the following:

1. That the rural inhabitant can easily grasp the themes of his/her existence when these are presented graphically in two dimensions. This implies that sessions of dialogues which reflect on a situation are made easier using this resource, the fotonovela, as a stimulus.

2. That one's self-respect is increased when s/he knows that other people in other places are proud to be what they are. In other words, that emulation is a very important aspect of affective learning.

3. That good humor, in spite of the oppressive conditions surrounding the Ecuadorian peasant, is an element that aids in confronting the daily situation of economic limits and cultural and psychic depression.

4. That government institutions in charge of extension services, of education, and of community services in general become very interested when they see that an innovative project is feasible.

   Before they try a project out in an institutional context, it is easier to do it outside of the institution in order to later present it as a possible alternative.

5. That the existent institutions and channels of communication, except the most orthodox, are already present in the culture and in the customs of the society. If it is necessary to seek new channels of communication and transference of information, it is equally necessary to identify elements that already exist as integral parts of the culture.